

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

8 September 2020

**Statements and Questions from Louise Weissel – Footpath Widening Barriers
– Bradford on Avon Bridge**

Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation

To Cllr Bridget Wayman – Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste

Statement 1

Firstly, I have grave concerns for pedestrian safety following the removal of the footpath-widening barriers over Bradford on Avon Town Bridge. I read on your website, that the removal of the lights and barriers is “in the interests of children returning to school.” This assumes that children are being DRIVEN to school, and by promoting swift car travel through Bradford on Avon, citing the school-run as a primary reason, I believe the council is in breach of Section 508A of the Education Act 1996, which states that **Local Authorities in England have a duty to promote sustainable modes of travel**. The Dept for Education Guidance published 11 August 2020, "Transport to school and other places of education: autumn term 2020", stresses '**strongly promoting active travel**'.

Question 1:

Will Wiltshire Council uphold its duties under the Education Act 1996 and follow the August 2020 Guidance to ensure that ALL children in Bradford on Avon can walk or cycle safely to school?

Response:

The Council encourages walking and cycling for school journeys where it is safe to do so. Not all children can realistically cycle or walk to school because of the size of the school catchment areas. Many children travel by bus, but in the current circumstances this may not be practical because of capacity limitations because of social distancing and an increase in car transport was anticipated as schools return.

There are a number of routes children walking to school in the town could use, including using McKeever bridge and the network of local footpaths. Following the route of the main road through the town is unlikely to be the most convenient route for them.

Statement 2

Secondly, pedestrians are advised to use a 'one way system' in order to cross the river – notably use of the McKeever Bridge. However, the McKeever Bridge route is very circuitous and involves 4 road-crossings to reach the main shops in the town centre; the ramped approaches either side are inaccessible to people with disabilities (the gradients are too steep for people with wheelchairs to manage safely), Church Street pavements are narrow and uneven and Church Street is very prone to flooding. The southern side involves crossing a busy car-park which is incredibly hazardous for people with mobility or sensory impairments. A one-way pedestrian system over the town bridge is now even more dangerous than before (especially for people who walk slowly) because one cannot cross the road to get to the downstream path due to the increased traffic speed (and the traffic does NOT stop). Importantly, social distancing when using either Town Bridge footpath is not possible without stepping into the traffic.

Question 2:

Will Wiltshire Council put in place footpath widening over the Town Bridge (which was greatly appreciated by older, frailer pedestrians, as well as parents with children) to ensure that we can cross the bridge safely and maintain social distancing?

It appears from the haste with which the pedestrian-safety barriers and traffic lights were dismantled, that the Cabinet Member for Transport has reacted to social media vitriol, without consulting older and disabled pedestrians about how they appreciated the scheme.

Response:

The potential benefits of providing additional space for pedestrians on town bridge was appreciated, and that is why the arrangement was trialled. Unfortunately, it became clear that the temporary traffic signals on the Town Bridge were leading to excessive delays, especially as traffic flows are likely to be increasing with the schools returning. Consequently, the decision was taken to remove the signals.

The views of residents and the Town Council have been taken into account and will continue to be considered. However, Wiltshire Council is the local highway authority and has responsibilities under the Highway Act and the Traffic Management Act with regard to the safety and operation of the highway network.

With limited road space and competing demands from pedestrians, cyclists, shoppers, visitors, public transport, vehicle users, and delivery vehicles it may not be possible to meet the requirements of all the road users.